DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 552 SP 038 670

AUTHOR Green, Jill
TITLE Engendering Bodies: Somatic Stories in Dance Education.
PUB DATE 1998-04-14
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Body Image; *Dance Education; Educational Research; Ethnography; Higher Education; *Learning Processes; Research Methodology; *Student Empowerment; *Student Needs; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Dancers; *Somatization

ABSTRACT

This paper examines specific pedagogical themes, findings, and implications for dance education. The focus is on the topic of educating the student body in dance. The paper draws on a preliminary introduction and analysis from a previous study and accompanying course which pointed out a common dominant focus in dance education (an externalized view of the body). That view tends to objectify the dancer's body and requires students to strive to achieve a specific look while being corrected so that the students perform proper dance technique. The term somatic authority as used in the paper is defined as a focus on and affirmation of what the body looks like or how it should behave. The dance education students in the study often defined somatic authority as a sense of personal engagement in the learning process and an ownership of the body. The paper also discusses the reflexive analysis of participant responses that were sometimes in conflict with the assumptions and ideas of the study. It concludes with a consideration of agency and other implications for dance education. (Contains 15 references.) (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 432 552

Engendering Bodies: Somatic Stories in Dance Education

Jill Green, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Department of Dance
220E HHP Bldg.
Greensboro, NC 27412

jillgreen@uncg,edu

April, 1998

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jill Green

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP038670

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Recently, a number of educational theorists have problematized the term "empowerment." They have suggested that although teachers sometimes claim to help students learn, in actuality, they may silence them or train them to act docily. For example, in her often cited scholarly piece, *Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy,* Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) raises some pedagogical concerns regarding teacher authority during her research with film students. Ellsworth suggests that critical or emancipatory educators, who are trying to change the ways we teach, often assume that they have privileged knowledge which they can use to help "free" students from oppressive dominant meaning systems. In order to "empower" students critical educators often offer access to methods that they believe may liberate students from false knowledge or what is often referred to as "false consciousness." But Ellsworth suggests that the concept of false consciousness implies that there is a "true consciousness"; she raises concern about any educational approach or perspective that places authority on a real truth that is not also looked at critically or problematized.

In the name of "empowerment," educators may sincerely attempt to free students from falsely imposed values or systems of knowledge. Ellsworth points out however, that progressive educators cannot be free from power relationships themselves. Rather, in an attempt to free, educate, or empower students,

teachers often inadvertently begin to speak for them, assume they know what is right for them, or even abuse them. She cautions educators to be aware and reflexive about how they attempt to "help" students "understand" the "truth" and how power plays out in the classroom regardless of liberatory intentions.

Similarly, dance is often thought of as a "freeing" art form, whereby performers use the body to "express" themselves in a myriad of ways. Artists in general are often considered renegades who break rules, and free us from an imposed dominant culture. Dance educators often attempt to "free" up students or open them up so that their bodies may be used as "expressive" instruments. Particularly in modern dance, educators and artists often believe that dance as a liberating experience and teachers often focus on offering students access to an ability to free themselves through movement.

Yet, dance teachers do not always attempt to be self-reflexive regarding the ways the student dance body may be mechanized or habituated into an ideal form that represents the teacher's learned belief system and presumed ideas about what the body should be and do. And it is not common to find dance educators reflecting on how power enables them to mold student bodies and standardize bodily behavior in class.

We may in a sense ask ourselves if we really free dance students to be expressive movers and empower them to use their bodies effectively. And if students, like Ellsworth's film

students, begin to ask whether or not they are "truly" empowered, dance educators and researchers may need to reassess commonly held beliefs and traditional pedagogical approaches and strategies for teaching dance.

I offer these considerations as an introduction to my study in which I investigated the body perceptions of student teachers in dance during a somatics and creativity project within a university setting. During the study and accompanying course titled, "The Gendered Body in Dance Education," somatic practice was used as a tool to investigate body perceptions and experiences of these undergraduate dance education majors. This teaching and research project explored how these body perceptions have been influenced by society and the dance world, particularly in reference to gender. For example, the participants were asked questions about previous experiences in dance, and how they have learned to perceive their bodies in reference to a specific weight and body ideal. Class movement explorations, somatic exercises and discussion were used as tools to explore social influences on the body.

At a dance conference in Miami, I presented the research and discussed a number of themes that emerged from the investigation, particularly regarding the myth of the ideal body in the dance world (Green, 1995). As is common in many large and complex qualitative research projects, I presented findings from a fuller investigation based on analysis around the theme of "the ideal body." In today's presentation, I will focus on specific

pedagogical themes, findings, and implications for dance education. My focus here, is on the topic of educating "the student body" in dance. Although gender is a specific consideration, and was particularly addressed in the last presentation, a number of issues here may be extrapolated to include men in dance too.

Since it is always so difficult to present qualitative research findings in so short a time period, I will not take time to specifically address the research design and methods. For this reason I have provided a methodology handout and I'd be glad to answer questions after the presentation.

The Study

As a recap or review of the fuller investigation, I draw on my preliminary introduction and analysis from Miami. There I pointed out a common dominant focus in dance education, on an externalized view of the body, a view that tends to objectify the dancer's body and requires students to strive to achieve a specific "look" while being "corrected" so that the students perform "proper" dance technique. I want to point out that this does not imply that technique is not valid or that all dance teachers focus more on outward appearance than a sense of inner authority--or that it is not valid to look at the dancer's body from an outside view. However, through a number of body stories told by the participants, I highlighted an often dominant focus on an objectified student dance body that without inner reflection, may lead to oppression and abuse.

As a qualitative researcher, I also discussed my personal struggle with an often adopted approach to teaching that reflects a particular power relationship between dance teacher and student. By this I mean an overriding approach that places an emphasis on the dance teacher as all-knowing expert and requires that students somatically detach from the inner messages of their bodies, consequently giving their bodies to their teachers (p.3).

As a somatic educator I have been concerned about body issues. I personally value proprioceptive awareness and the ability of students to listen to the inner messages of the soma. And as a researcher who has been interested in socio-cultural issues related to the body and dance education, I have been interested in postpositivist methodologies that allow me to investigate such issues within a broader and more socially critical context.

Somatic Authority

Before discussing findings regarding the training of student bodies in dance, I'd like to talk a bit about what I mean by somatic authority. By somatic authority I mean a focus on and affirmation of what goes on inside the body rather than a sole focus on what the body looks like or how it "should" behave. In other words, beyond simply objectifying students and looking at the external appearance of the body, somatic educators tend to include students in the process of learning dance by bringing awareness to inner sensory and proprioceptive processes too. Don Johnson refers to this as sensual authority or experiential authority (1992).

According to Johnson, and a number of other somatic theorists, Western culture creates the myth of a body/mind split that removes us from the experience of bodies and often results in disconnecting us from our somas as living processes. As a result we are often numbed to the awareness of internal body messages and the power of our connected selves.

Furthermore, as Johnson suggests, dominant cultures often perpetuate this body/mind split in an effort to maintain somatic weakness. He asserts that by disconnecting us from our sensory selves through the imposition of external models of "ideal bodies" the dominant culture maintains control as we begin to distrust our own sensory impulses and give up our somatic authority.

In line with Johnson's claim that disconnection leads to social control, somatic authority in dance may be viewed in relationship to Michel Foucault's idea of docile bodies. Foucault, a postmodern thinker, who looked at power and its relationship to knowledge (1979; 1980), was particularly interested in studying power in institutions. He addressed the extremes of standardizing bodily behavior that have characterized institutions such as military schools, prisons and mental hospitals and believed that schools are primarily designed to train docile citizens. His studies similarly approach the body as a site of social and political control and power.

However, Foucault did not explain power and control as an external force placed on subjects from without through prohibition

or force. He rejected power as repressive but rather explained it through discourse regarding the ways it is exercised through explicit laws and codes requiring citizens to be under constant surveillance. Foucault did not claim that the body can provide us with a grounded "truth" or help us to find a true self. He spoke about "technologies of the self" that are part of regimes of power. They are techniques that society requires of people to discipline themselves. As a result, society produces what Foucault has referred to as "docile bodies," which are bodies that are self regulated and habituated. In this sense, the training of docile bodies in dance removes the student from a sense of somatic authority through techniques that require habituated movement patterns and regulate the body as a training instrument in dance. If Foucault studied dance education as culture he might say that students' bodies in the dance class are constantly under surveillance.

Findings: Training Docile Bodies in Dance

For the dance education students in the study, somatic authority often meant a sense of personal engagement in the learning process and an ownership of the student body. Throughout the project students began to affirm this sense of inner awareness or authority. One student, who I will call Tess explained it as a connection to the body and refusal to disconnect from her physical needs. While describing former experiences in dance she spoke about health issues when referring to this idea:

> I always thought I could push myself....over and over. And now that I'm getting more in touch with myself [during the somatic class and course of the research project], it's like....I can't abuse my body....It's that I have to take care of myself, because if I don't, the body's....just going to collapse.

For other students somatic authority meant taking time to feel their bodies. Another student, Nancy, spoke of this in relationship to some of the somatic practices experienced in class when she said, "Somatics has been so nice for me, because it's the only time I can slow down all week long."

But when describing past experiences in dance education, the students overwhelmingly referred to situations when they felt disconnected from inner sensory feedback, a numbness toward inner bodily sensations, and even a sense of abuse they had sometimes felt during their prior dance training. Again I do not attempt to imply that dance education is a monolith, that all dance forms are taught alike and that all teachers use similar methods and strategies, nor do I wish to universalize dance education. This qualitative study focused on one particular teaching setting reflective of the five participants in this particular study. But these student responses and experiences may raise some issues and generate some theory and discussion regarding the teaching of student bodies.

For example, one overriding concern for these dance education students was teacher abuse and power. Due to a focus on external

appearance, and an unattainable body ideal, students often felt required to give up their sense of somatic authority and power to the dance teacher. As Tess professed, "We treat dance instructors as gods because that is the way we are brought up. We don't question what they say. We don't question what they do."

Student comments and responses often resonated with Johnson's reference to a body ideal that disconnects us from a sense of an inner authority and Foucault's notion of disciplining the body through surveillance. With the teacher's eye constantly on students, the teacher does not have to impose outside force to motivate students to perform according to specific standards; the students learn to discipline themselves through self-regulation and unconscious habit. Unfortunately, this habituation often leads to a disconnection from the inner messages of the body as well as a loss of a sense of authority and control. And, while a watchful eye can sometimes work in a student's favor, without a sense of student ownership of the body, it sometimes leads to unsafe pedagogical practice, injury, physical strain, pain, and a general lack of confidence and well being.

For example, during the time of the research study, many of the student participants were taking classes with a new guest artist (Jeff). According to the students, Jeff often treated their bodies as entities to be looked at and judged from his expert "gaze" and as objects for him to manipulate and control. During one class discussion, Nancy remembered him saying to her

> Your body doesn't do this right. It should *look* like this, (my emphasis)....when he did it [forced her leg up the side], he had my leg and he was saying, 'put your hip down, put your hip down.' And I felt like I was going like that [demonstrating a twisted, contorted, pained position and expression on her face]....And he goes, "Well, it could be higher and look better."

Another student Missy emphasized his focus on pushing the body beyond where students felt comfortable when she explained, "He has this philosophy that like if you keep stretching it beyond your limits [referring to forcing the height of the leg], it's going to go further." Other students also referred to his assertive, quick, and uncaring approach to his classes. For example, Jasmine characterized his classes when she said, "It was just boom, boom, boom. You are doing this wrong. Correct it now."

Students constantly communicated the idea that they were taught to train their bodies in accordance to conform with this teacher's bodily ideals, aesthetic and ideas about how the body should move. This not only meant striving for physical perfection through such common techniques as weight control practices and changes of appearance, but forcing their bodies into "shape." Sometimes this meant allowing him to physically force their bodies to conform with idealized dance movements such as high extensions or perfect turnout. There were accounts of his pulling student hair and physically wrenching body parts beyond where students felt comfortable. There were also stories about other teachers who physically forced turnout from the feet or manipulated student

bodies in other destructive ways. Students were literally required to openly allow teachers to touch, prod and manipulate them. The message here was to avoid the inner messages of the body and to numb the body to pain.

Although these examples demonstrate direct teacher force, the participants also provided many examples of teacher directions which required self training and regulation in order to achieve an external standard. Comments included instructions and corrections such as, "Don't let your butt stick out," "Lock your knees," "Make sure your back is flat," "Squeeze your butt." Students indicated that these instructions often gradually became part of their own unconscious inner talk during dance classes in general and that much of this inner talk focused on an imposed outward appearance or way of moving, one that they felt must be forced into place.

Teachers were also accused of stopping class to point out student weaknesses in these areas. According to the participants, pressure to meet these standards led to dysfunctional bodily habits and movement strategies such as tucking the pelvis under, hyperextending the knees, forcing turnout and a number of other physical ailments, injury, lack of feelings of connection and well-being, physical and emotional distress and pain.

Furthermore participants suggested that the overriding message was not to trust their sensory impulses or take care of their bodies; the teachers were experts who should be obeyed without question or reflection. For example, Nancy suggested that Jeff

purposely required movements that were dangerous to perform. She once recalled that he demonstrated a particularly unsafe movement sequence and then told the students to watch out because he had people bust their face on the floor while performing this sequence in the past.

With the training of docile dance bodies so prevalent in the minds of these participants, authority and power relationships became overriding themes in the study. The participants often discussed feelings of oppression and dominance by powerful instructors. Some students indicated that they felt intimated by various teachers and some outwardly described specific teachers as authoritarian. During class discussions Kathy referred to "the whole authoritarian structure" of dance classes. And Tess referred to a silent code when she said, "If you break the code of what you're supposed to do, you are just upsetting the whole hierarchy." In her journal, Jasmine literally and metaphorically remembered, "I remember beginning a jazz class...and I got scolded for being out of line."

Many times, participants discussed particular authoritarian practices and standardized behaviors that were previously required within the broader educational dance setting. Often control was established through institutionalized codes of dress and behavior, particularly in classes at dance conservatories, where students in different levels were required to wear different colored leotards and eating was monitored by teachers.

Competition, cliques, and rivalry for teacher attention were other tensions discussed. These conditions often further exacerbated inequities in power while disconnecting students from a sense of somatic awareness and authority. They also led to feelings of intimidation, student frustration, isolation and lack of confidence.

Moreover, students often perceived dance programs as divisive and dance teachers as unsupportive and threatening. Most of the participants indicated that they were the target of unfair grades and that some teachers wielded their power with grades or through humiliation during class. Furthermore, some students reported difficulty with the assessment process and felt that they received lower grades due to how their bodies looked or whether they behaved or performed according to standardized teacher expectations. During mid-term evaluations, there was particular concern regarding meetings with Jeff, the aforementioned guest artist. Jasmine indicated that he told her she could go no further because she does not have a good body, while Nancy was told she has an excellent dance body, and therefore she should perform better.

The participants often talked about this abuse of power as a violation and assault that resulted in a disconnection from their bodies. Somatic awareness sessions and practice tended to provide students with a place where they could reconnect to inner senses and somatic impulses while releasing some of the habitual physical strain required from keeping constant vigilance and surveillance

over their bodies in dance class.

However, it may be significant to point out that although somatic practice was used as a vehicle for body awareness and release of habitual tension patterns, I caution educators not to use somatic practice separate from a social analysis and critical thought. It may be just as dangerous to view somatic practice as a panacea for dealing with the effects of power and the training of docile bodies. In past research, I have pointed out the danger of solely employing somatic practice outside the recognition of a sociopolitical context and in an individualistic and micro context alone (Green, 1993, 1994, 1996). Without a broader social context used to examine how are bodies are socially habituated and regulated through technologies of normalization, we are not likely to change pressure to conform to a dominant ideal body model or break down strategies for training docile bodies.

Reflexive Analysis: Surprises and Discrepant Cases

Up to this point, it may seem that participant responses neatly fit into place regarding my own paradigmatic positioning and theoretical assumptions when I entered the study. Certainly researchers can easily make data fit into their own theoretical framework. For this reason, I did consciously attempt to look for conflict with my assumptions and ideas when I entered the study. As a result of this effort I found a number of places where data bumped up against my theoretical leanings. I became aware that the pieces to this research puzzle did not actually fit together so

neatly as I found myself struggling with a number of outliers and discrepant cases.

I chose to first discuss what seemed to come together while saving some of these problematic aspects or findings until the end of the discussion. There were, however, a number of surprises as well as disconfirming pieces of evidence, as is often common in a self-reflexive postpositivist analysis in which the researcher seeks out conflict and complexities through a search for disconfirming data.

For example, I found that not all past experiences in dance education involved such abuse as some of the aforementioned examples. Although I did not formerly assume that all dance education is abusive, I did enter the project with a sense that many pedagogical strategies often lead to physical and emotional dysfunction. There were a number of discussions that included memories of effective and helpful university dance teachers regarding attitudes toward the body and pedagogical style. Interestingly, most of these memories involved women teachers who included inner bodily awareness in their classes and taught with a more somatically sensitive teaching style; some men were awarded some positive qualities too (i.e. using somatic practices and approaches) but women were reserved for particular acclaim regarding this consideration.

Another discrepancy was evident in a number of Missy's negative responses to the more supportive teachers as well as a

resonance with the ones who were problematic to other participants. For example, Missy often had problems in more supportive and somatic classes. And she often expressed success with teachers like Jeff who intimated other students while she sometimes explained that she likes to be pushed and physically challenged. She said that she hurts in Jeff's classes but that she liked it.

Listening to her, I could not help but feel that Missy's responses were connected to her training, that she may have felt more comfortable with this approach because it was familiar. She felt like she was working "hard" and achieving success in controlling her body through self-discipline and restraint. In Susan Bordo's sense of colluding with the dominant culture or power at play, (1989; 1993) she may have experienced some sense of mastery over her body, with pain as an unfortunate result. Her words often haunted me because I could not help but think this was a case of physical denial and an effort to numb the body. Interestingly, she also spoke of a prior eating disorder where she felt a sense of mastery over her body when denying herself food and working at shaping her body into a specific ideal. She also experienced some problems with the somatic work because it did not always help her to feel better but sometimes made her aware of her physical discomfort and brought out negative feelings about her body size. For example, she explained the feeling of her body taking up space as an undesirable goal which may be associated with fatness. She commented that

> Sometimes the somatic work can work for me as in like, releasing tension and stuff like that. Then other times it doesn't work because I start thinking about my body and the shape of my body....Sometimes I can just let everything go, but other times, when you're concentrating on yourself... you go down to your back, or go down to this part of your body, then you're like, OK this part of my body is wide.

I struggled with this response because I could not help but feel that Missy may have experienced discomfort because she previously attempted to tune out the inner messages of her body in an attempt to work towards a body ideal. This may indicate a feeling of personal responsibility to train a docile body rather than an awareness of impossible larger social standards. In other words, while listening to her body she experienced feeling unsuccessful and was frustrated because she did not meet an objectified body ideal.

On the other hand I did not want to disempower Missy by negating her feeling of control over her body, whether that control was real to me or not. Interestingly, by her exiting interview, Missy did come to feel that it was helpful to reconnect to her sensory impulses. She confessed

> I guess I was viewing it the wrong way....that it [somatic practice and awareness] was not a good thing because it was having a negative impact. But then I realized that it wasn't negative...and that changed around....I was thinking it was bad but then I saw how it can help you get in touch with it [the socially constructed body].

After hearing this comment, I wondered whether she would have reached this conclusion if I had intervened and described her initial experience as invalid.

Jasmine also indicated discomfort with body awareness practices but saw it as a tool for personal and social awareness. For example when she referred to somatic practice she said,

> It brought up things more when I was really relaxed....Sometimes it brought up some very painful issues...that I was trying to deny....All of a sudden you may feel your body tense because you've learned how to be aware of it.

Nancy also often provided a sense of tension and contradiction when communicating perceptions about her body and past experiences in dance. She said that she did not feel bad about her body and often discussed the positive dance education she received from a former teacher at a private studio. Although she had addressed many body problems after arriving at the university, she claimed that she was very happy in dance prior to her move to the university. She attributed this attitude to her natural cheerful disposition, inability to feel depressed and the nurturing care of her family and former teacher. She seemed to not want to deal with critical analysis or any contradictory feelings regarding her body. I struggled with my liberatory need as a progressive educator to free her from her denial but she continued to express that everything was fine. She claimed she did not have a dark side and resisted working on dances that did not express happiness and lightness. She perceived herself as strong and attributed her strength to her positive self image. I, as researcher and teacher, observed that there appeared to be a lack of strength in Nancy's body and movement. However, Nancy continually perceived her own

strength and happiness.

As teacher and researcher I was drawn to the idea that Nancy may have associated strength with the projection of a constantly happy "appearance." Perhaps, Nancy did feel good because she was supported and valued at home and in her prior dance classes. She often spoke about a former teacher who affirmed all body types and appreciated the value of each student. However, I sensed that Nancy's stories seemed "too good" and that she was demonstrating "good girl" qualities. My ongoing personal frustration with Nancy's resistance to "think critically" and address issues related to the body in a reflexive and thoughtful manner created a certain postmodern tension[1] during the study. I found myself attributing this denial to what many critical theorists refer to as a "false consciousness" (see Lather, 1994) and resistance to think critically.

My observations were confirmed by some participants who expressed concern regarding Nancy's views. After Nancy rejected some of Jasmine's concerns regarding body objectification in dance classes, Jasmine referred to as Nancy's "ignorance" and "negativity" regarding the other participants' feelings of marginalization. Nancy also did confirm her behavior as self disciplined and conditioned at times. For example, she attributed her resistance to delving into serious issues and her dislike of "heavy" dance to her prior education where she got more rewards for smiling on stage. And she did complain about teacher attitudes

about perceived body problems and expectations from teachers who characterized her "perfect body," while expressing her concern that she was not perfect at all.

Furthermore, her connection to a body ideal may not have been conscious but nevertheless apparent at times. When discussing a particular student's problem with weight control, she inadvertently said, "I would have killed to have her body." This provided some evidence that she was influenced by the social construct of a specific body ideal. And although she said that pressure to achieve an ideal body did not bother her, she did recognize and affirm that body ideals were socially influenced and destructive to other students; she expressed concern about health considerations and expressed a desire to affirm bodily difference and diversity in her future classes. So here again I found myself struggling with data that did not fit together so neatly.

To my surprise, there were also a number of themes that I did not expect to emerge from the investigation. For example, race surfaced in a number of instances.

Some feminist and postmodern scholars are reexamining earlier perspectives and are critical of oversimplifications and over generalizations characteristic of earlier periods of feminism. Many scholars point out that it is dangerous to assume all women's experience is universal and that gender can be constructed around the experiences of white women. And a number of feminists are now addressing the dangers of valorizing constructs that may be

unconsciously racist and elitist (Bordo, 1993) In fact, some scholars problematize the notion of experience at all because it tends to universalize assumptions about knowing and define normal gender behavior while marginalizing groups that do not fit into a dominant model.

Reflecting back on the theoretical assumptions that guided the study, I realized that I made the same error and demonstrated the same blindness that has been attributed to white feminists by some African American scholars. In the end I found it beneficial to observe and hear the responses of an African American student while I realized that you cannot really talk about gender as separate from race.

For example, in this study, Jasmine raised issues of difference regarding perceptions of women's bodies. During class we were fortunate that Jasmine talked about these issues in a number of ways. For one thing, she came to me because she wanted to address some of the issues she was dealing with as an African American dancer but felt were difficult to communicate because as she said, "The other students don't want to talk about racism." I encouraged her to raise the issue in class and began to gear the research toward these issues. I began to ask questions such as "How does racism relate to body ideals?" "How does the body affect African-Americans when we are talking about a white body ideal?" "How do we marginalize students of different cultures in class?" And the students began to communicate the importance of these

issues. As Tess explained, "We tried not to [look at race]. Not until Jasmine went, Wait a minute I'm here too."

There has been some scholarly discussion about difference regarding body ideals themselves. It has been argued that African American women are not tied to normalizing images and standards and that larger women are more accepted in the black community (p. 63). Jasmine often claimed that she was affected by standardizing body ideals but she did suggest that some of her issues were different. Specifically, when talking about body image, she spoke about perceptions of the lightness of skin as being a factor in the black community and how she struggles with life as a light skinned African American.

Jasmine also addressed her frustration at wanting to discuss her issues but seeing that other dancers did always understand or want to talk about her concerns although she said that she did feel successful when raising issues and getting other students to discuss her concerns and feel more comfortable about discussing race.

Jasmine was often more sensitive to attitudes toward her as an African American dance student than to attitudes about her female body; however, these concerns sometimes overlapped. For example, besides finding difficulty talking about problems she explained that the African American students in dance are often pushed to the back of the room and are actually physically displaced in class. She recalled that teachers often ignored her because they did not

want to deal with the race problem or racial tension, and some did not encourage her to succeed because they had prejudged her failure based on her skin color.

With the significance of these differences in mind, however, I believe, as Bordo suggests, that we should be cautious about assuming too much difference regarding gender. Bordo and other feminists, although affirming difference, are not willing to throw out gender as a construct and are unwilling to accept the notion that white woman alone are affected by standards regarding appearance. Referring to a 1990 article in *Essence*, "Fat is a black woman's issue too," she suggests that although sometimes commanding another aesthetic or standard, black women are also held to ideal models. Furthermore she cites a number of sources that illustrate the growing trend toward ads in magazines with wide black readership that glamorize slenderness and other white Western body ideals and bodily behavior (1993, p. 63, 103).

Resonating with Bordo's argument that black women are also affected by body ideals, Jasmine demonstrated numerous struggles with achieving an ideal body type. Furthermore, she often referred to particular pressure as an African American student since she was in the dance world and felt she needed to meet the standards of a western white model and a dance ideal. In some ways her problems were more severe. For example she referred to a number of times when African American students had been particularly chastised for

"having a big butt" and forcibly encouraged to tuck their pelvises under. So in this case body ideal standards and implications in dance education were relevant to Jasmine and as Kathy suggested, some of her African American issues were feminist issues.

Agency and Other Implications for Dance Education

In closing, I'd like to talk a bit about action. Very often agency is valued as a validity criteria in postpositivist research (Lather, 1986, 1991, 1993). Particularly for emancipatory pedagogy, educators and researchers attempt to work toward change and action in both the teaching and research processes. This is why teaching and research often overlap.

For this reason, throughout the class and project I asked the participants about the relevance of the issues in relationship to their goals and objectives as dance teachers. Many ideas, strategies and plans for action were generated. For one thing, these participants discussed the need for awareness of these issues. As Jasmine suggested

> It's important just to be aware that we can address those [issues]. You have those materials in the back of your mind from this class and some different ways of getting [toward] somatic and gender [awareness]....I'm thinking that, like if somebody in class has a problem wearing leotards and tights...that they have a problem with their body, say OK, it's all right to wear a shirt or put dance pants on.

The participants also referred to the need to teach multiculturally, in other words, to be aware of who is marginalized in the dance class and to be aware of judging students based on body types. Interestingly, Missy, although striving at times to

achieve a muscular look, indicated that there is nobody who can meet these impossible standards and said she would strive to bring this awareness into her future classes.

Furthermore, participants addressed the need to honor all body types and teach to all students both in the studio, by emphasizing that dancers come in all shapes and sizes, and outside it by choreographing works that use dancers of different sizes, and alternative body types, bringing in and showing videos of ethnically diverse dance companies and dancers who use different body types and deconstructing traditional gender roles.

I was quite surprised that by the end of the project, the participants were also thinking about directly addressing critical issues in class. As Kathy suggested, "As dance educators, we can integrate ways of broadening the definition of who is a dancer....and how they should be and act and look." They spoke about including classes modeled on the one we used for the project and by brainstorming and leading discussions which directly raise the issue of body ideals and habits. Kathy also suggested teaching dance history critically and including the body as a topic. Some specific ideas included using videos of traditional dancing critically by raising questions regarding the lack of color and diverse body types and problematizing ads, texts and other materials and sources that teach and perpetuate reliance on achieving a body ideal, and to recognize and challenge bias and prejudice in the classroom.

After acknowledging uneasy feelings regarding race, Jasmine came to class prepared with questions addressing diversity in dance education in order to lead a critical discussion on the topic. This type of critical discussion was later raised as a potential multicultural and feminist pedagogical strategy. The participants were also interested in challenging the societal construct that female dancers must be skinny by discussing the detrimental effects of the pressure to attain this ideal including particular ways this may lead to bodily disconnection (i.e retraction of the pelvis to fit the body of an ideal women can lead to alignment problems and injury while the additional compensation of tucking the pelvis under can create another set of problems).

Finally, the participants also discussed plans to incorporate somatic and body awareness practices into their classes and curricula and as Tess suggested to also make it available to men because they are not often taught to get in touch with their bodies. Kathy spoke to the need for somatic work when she said, "Somatic experience, you know, connecting the mind and the body, would seem to be another feminist pedagogical tool because a lot of dance doesn't necessarily do that."

Many of the participants spoke about helping students reclaim ownership of their bodies and associated somatic authority with an inner strength. Regarding direct strength training, Kathy expressed her plans to continue using somatic practice in the fitness world by emphasizing an inner focus. She articulated that

by reconnecting inwardly even fitness teachers may incorporate a somatic approach to an activity that generally brings authority to objectified bodies. For the most part the participants were interested in using strategies that disconnect from an external standard and reconnect to their embodied selves or to use Jasmine's words, "to really get into your body."

Conclusion

Thinking back on Ellworth's advice to be reflective about the ways we cannot escape power over our students, I am aware that this study taught me that as teachers and researchers we need to be careful about assuming we have the key to opening up students in dance. Yes, I still believe in an action oriented critical agenda and in the necessity to change the way we teach dance. Certainly the participants affirmed the need for a pedagogical approach that honors inner work and somatic authority. However, at the same time, we also need to look at how our own previous training and even our changing assumptions about the body interact with students in the dance class. For example, because I advocate viewing the body as a social construction inscribed by the culture in which we live, I assumed that strength training was destructive because it took student bodies, particularly women's bodies, away from a sense of somatic authority and imposed an objectified view of the body through an unattainable aesthetic. Yet, a number of participants recalled a sense of inner strength from such work. I needed to look at how complex these issues and interactions can be for

students. If I attempt to speak for the students I as a teacher and researcher may do just as much harm as those more traditional teachers who directly require standardized bodily behaviors from their students. However, although I attempt to be self-reflexive and problematize my own agenda, at the same time I continue to feel an ethical obligation to look at how students bodies are inscribed by society and dance culture. I still feel compelled to work for creating a healthier dance space while searching for strategies that bring authority to the inner work necessary to help students empower their own bodies.

Note

[1]Erica McWilliam (1993, 1994) describes postmodern tension as a physical [or somatic] response to the uncertainty of knowledge and "truth" in a postmodern world. Postpositivist researchers often struggle with the multiple perspectives of participants, researcher and theories while attempting to make meaning of a research context. See also Green, 1993, and Green, 1994 for a description of this condition and a discussion about how somatic sensitivity may be used as a research tool.

References

Bordo, S. R. (1989). The body and the reproduction of femininity: A feminist appropriation of Foucault. In A. M. Jaggar & S. R. Bordo (Eds.), Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing (pp. 13-33). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Bordo, S. R. (1993). Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Ellsworth, E. (1992). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. In C.Luke & J. Gore (Eds.), Feminisims and critical pedagogy (pp. 90-119). New York: Rutledge.

Foucault, M. (1979). Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1980). The history of sexuality: Vol. 1. An Introduction (R. Hurley, Trans.) New York: Vintage.

Green, J. (1993). Fostering creativity through movement and body awareness practices: A pospositivist investigation into the relationship between somatics and the creative process (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1993). Dissertation Abstracts International, 54 (11), 3910A.

Green, J. (1994, April). Postpositivist Research in Somatics and Creativity. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Dance Association (American Alliance of Health, Physical

Education, Recreation and Dance), Denver, CO.

Green, J. (1995, November). Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Congress of Research on Dance, Miami, FL.

Green, J. (1996). Choreographing a postmodern turn: The creative process and somatics. Impulse,4 267-275.

Johnson, D. (1992). Body: Recovering our sensual wisdom. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books and Somatic Resources.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. Interchange, 17(4), 63-84.

Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. New York: Routledge.

Lather, P. (1993). Fertile obsession: Validity after Poststructuralism. The Sociological Quarterly, 34(4), 673-693.

McWilliam, E. (1993). 'Post' Haste: Plodding research and galloping theory. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 14(2), 199-205.

McWilliam, E. (1994). In broken images: Feminist tales for a different teacher education. New York: Teachers College Press.